

# MASS MoCA

## **Carrie Schneider: Sphinx looks at image culture through a feminist lens**

**Carrie Schneider: Sphinx is on view March 11, 2023 – September 2023**

**North Adams, MA, February 15, 2023** – Beginning March 11, MASS MoCA will present a suite of new works made by artist Carrie Schneider. Three series of photographs and a 16mm film—all made over the past 2½ years—play with the camera’s imaginative potential and the image’s fraught relationship to power, authorship, and the feminine.

Like many of us, Schneider reinvented the way she lived and worked during the pandemic; sequestered at home with her young son, the artist’s garage became her workspace, and she sought community and inspiration through virtual means. The artist constructed a room-sized camera with industrial plastic, acrylic sheets, and a 480mm Rodenstock lens; experimenting with multiple exposures on chromogenic paper, she ultimately developed the in-camera process that produces a unique, painterly print. After a year of isolation, Schneider had created a series of 105 unique photographs that function as a kind of pandemic diary and a portrait of both an inner life and a desire to connect.

The works in the series, titled *Deep Like*, merge images from Schneider’s personal archive and friends’ social media feeds with reproductions of works by artists including Chantal Akerman, Twyla Tharp, Francisco Goya, Sigmar Polke, Charline von Heyl, Jeff Wall, and Sol LeWitt (whose 105 wall drawings at MASS MoCA have an uncanny parallel to Schneider’s series of the same number). Though they bring to mind early photographic experiments, Schneider’s images reveal their contemporaneity through references to digital practices and image culture of the current moment; phones appear throughout the work, and the title *Deep Like* references the act of “liking” a post deep in someone’s social media feed. The presentation of this series is complemented by a selection of related photographs printed on hand-cut 40 inch wide paper. These draw on the vocabulary of images established in *Deep Like*. These large-scale prints (and the scale of MASS MoCA’s galleries) in turn led Schneider to work with entire rolls of paper, hundreds of feet long, for a single work. Treating her photographs like sculptural material, the artist lets the unwieldy lengths unfurl down and across walls in waves of undulating folds in *Revenge Body* (2022), *Eve of the Future* (2023), and *Double Kill* (2023). These works transform the usually flat image into an embodied object and translate the moving image into a proliferation of stills that can be viewed – dissected – all at once.

Schneider’s more sculptural works focus on images from the proverbial “big screen,” and are informed by the feminist film theory of Laura Mulvey as well as the films of Andy Warhol. The works feature iconic actresses from the 1970s including the Austrian actress Romy Schneider and American actress Sissy Spacek (in the 1976 film *Carrie*). Throughout the exhibition, “Carries” and “Schneiders” repeat, a playful nod to the artist’s own name and the role of images – both analog and digital – in the construction (or destruction) of self.

The exhibition culminates with a 16mm film, *Sphinx (the answer is man)*, crafted from 316 still images of Romy Schneider extracted from the film *L'Important C'est d'Aimer*. In the artist’s work, Romy Schneider’s image is framed on a phone which she holds in her hands. The artist’s nails, at times painted in red

polish, sometimes bare, reveal the passing of time and the labored process of (re)producing the still images. Each is unique, shifting in appearance with the varied backgrounds Schneider produces with layered, multiple exposures. The same images of Romy Schneider's face are visible on a 400 foot long roll of photo paper in an adjacent gallery, which lies splayed on a plinth as if the film strip has spilled out of the projector. Titled *Madame Psychosis* (Joelle Van Dyne), the work references David Foster Wallace's novel *Infinite Jest* (1996), in which a 'lethally addictive' film depicting a woman's face (starring character Joelle van Dyne, a.k.a. Madame Psychosis) will cause anyone who watches the film to die simply because they are unable to look away. The beautiful woman projected on the wall of the gallery, however, beseeches us to avert our gaze. The artist pulls the frames from a scene immediately before Romy Schneider begs a paparazzo, "Don't take photos!" She looks at the camera with a mix of fear, sadness, resignation, and resistance. As the sphinx of the exhibition's title suggests, however (a nod to Mulvey's 1977 avant-garde film *Riddles of the Sphinx* which retells the Oedipal myth from the point of view of a single working mother), she perhaps remains unknowable, her riddle yet to be unraveled.

### **In Conversation: Carrie Schneider and Laura Mulvey**

*On April 3 at 4:30pm in MASS MoCA's Club B10, influential feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey – known for her seminal 1975 essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" – discusses her new book, Afterimages: On Cinema, Women and Changing Times, and its intersections with Carrie Schneider's work.*

### **Catalog**

*In conjunction with the exhibition, MASS MoCA and Hassla Books will co-publish a catalog with contributions from Dana DeGiulio, Sarah Lookofsky, Aristilde Kirby, Carmen Maria Machado, and exhibition curator Susan Cross.*

### **Excerpts from Sarah Lookofsky's text "Vixens, Sphinxes, Mommies (and Some Sphincters, too)":**

#### ***The vixen who kills and dies***

*Laura Mulvey has famously theorized the woman's face in Hollywood cinema as the ultimate spectacle, stopping narrative in its tracks: exclusively white, eyes exaggerated but never meeting the lens, lips parted with corners drawn up. Her face is the fetishistic object of the male gaze, while deflecting from the rest of her body, which is a cause of anxiety. The face therefore also literally masks a threat. This face, in her later work reread through study afforded by digital technology's slowing down and speeding up, becomes a signifier of death. Death in that celluloid is a physical capture of a body now long gone; dead in that cinema's magic was to create life from individual, still images; and death because celluloid in itself is by now dying, if not already dead. David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* features a plot in which a film informally called "the Entertainment" kills everyone who watches it precisely because they cannot look away. The film reportedly features a woman of incomparable beauty... filmed through a "neo-natal lens." As Carrie believes, it is hard to imagine that Wallace had not read Mulvey, evidenced also by the fact that the character who provides the account of this deadly film is herself a "film and film-canister" PhD student. In Mulvey as in Wallace, the quintessential cipher of cinematic, capitalist entertainment is female and marked by death.*

#### ***The sphinx***

*The cat-slash-woman who sits and reveals little: the enigma. She is also a threat, of course, devouring those who do not properly answer her. Her threat is like that of the vixen, her power, but—in contrast to the vixen—she is not simply an object of voyeurism. The sphinx looks back, is multidimensional, she*

*needs to be approached. Her form is not flat but best understood by circumnavigation.*

## **Artist Bio**

Carrie Schneider (b. 1979, Chicago) is based between Hudson, New York, and New York City. She has exhibited her photographs and videos at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; the Pérez Art Museum Miami; The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh; The Art Institute of Chicago; The Kitchen, New York; Kunsthall Charlottenborg, Copenhagen; the Finnish Museum of Photography, Helsinki; Galería Alberto Sendros, Buenos Aires; and santralistanbul, Istanbul. Her work has been reviewed in *The New York Times*, *Artforum*, *VICE*, *Modern Painters*, and *The New Yorker*. She received a Creative Capital Award and a Fulbright Fellowship, and attended the Whitney Museum of American Art's Independent Study Program and the Skowhegan School of Painting & Sculpture. Her work is in numerous public collections including The Art Institute of Chicago; Minneapolis Institute of Art; Museum of Contemporary Photography, Chicago; Haggerty Museum of Art, Milwaukee; Centre Canadien d'architecture, Montreal; Art in Embassy, Mbabane, Swaziland; University Galleries, Illinois State University; and DePaul University Public Collection, Chicago. She received an MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and a BFA from Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh.

**Press Images can be found [here](#).**

**For more information, please contact**

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